

Enlighten Action for Epilepsy

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March is Epilepsy Awareness month in Hong Kong, so we spoke to DB resident Shyamala Padmasola, Project Trainer & Marketing Coordinator for Enlighten, the only epilepsy-focused, non-medical, non-governmental charity which aims to benefit the lives of anyone directly or indirectly affected by epilepsy in Hong Kong.

According to Shyamala “although there are over 64,000 people with epilepsy in Hong Kong, we hardly hear about them because they choose to live in silence for fear of being discriminated against. The unjustified stigma towards epilepsy that has existed globally throughout history still exists”. She tells us that it was only last year that the Chinese character for epilepsy was changed to ‘no (brain) gan’ from ‘dean (crazy) gan’. Dean Gan was synonymous to being crazy.

WHAT IS EPILEPSY?

Epilepsy is a common neurological disorder, the common characteristic of which is a series of repetitive seizures. A seizure is caused by abnormal excessive electric discharges leading to a sudden burst of excess electrical activity in the brain, causing a temporary disruption in the normal message passing between brain cells. This disruption results in the brain's messages becoming halted or mixed up.

Epilepsy is not a disease, and people with Epilepsy are not mentally ill. It can develop in anyone at any age, and in many cases there is no known cause. Some of the known causes include:

- Infants born with defects in the structure of the brain
- Brain damage during birth due to birth trauma, lack of oxygen or infection
- Infectious diseases such as meningitis, encephalitis, and other malarial and tuberculosis infections
- Benign or malignant tumours
- Scarred brain tissue resulting from a severe head injury or trauma
- Genetic conditions such as tuberous sclerosis that might cause non-malignant brain tumours
- Strokes
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Consumption of food infested with tapeworm eggs is also a cause of epilepsy in some parts of Asia

ABOUT ENLIGHTEN

The charity's vision is to build a community that is accepting and understanding of those with epilepsy to enable them to lead vibrant and active lives in Hong Kong. Enlighten's mission is two-fold:

To provide support and care to those affected by epilepsy through one-on-one counselling, support networks and community support programmes.

To remove prejudice through community education, including education and training programmes in schools and businesses, and public awareness programmes in shopping centres which aim to improve public knowledge and understanding of epilepsy and change the many myths and perceptions.

Enlighten recently rebranded the charity with a new logo of a caring hand holding a burning candle to illustrate their mission and create a symbolic identity. The new logo also incorporates the name change in Chinese for epilepsy.

Shyamala strongly believes that equipping today youngsters with epilepsy knowledge and a positive attitude towards epilepsy will significantly raise epilepsy awareness over the next decade.

Get Involved

March 26th 2012 is "Purple Day" which aims to raise awareness about epilepsy worldwide. Throughout March, Enlighten is encouraging everyone to "Paint the Town Purple" by wearing purple t-shirts, donating purple notes (\$HK10s), hosting fundraising and awareness events in schools and businesses, and learning seizure first-aid. Look out for purple bracelets and other purple initiatives in retail outlets throughout Hong Kong which will raise funds for the charity.

Visit www.enlightenhk.org for more details or call 2820 0111.